

Written Direct Testimony of Jessie Kaleinohea Cleghorn

My name is Jessie Kaleinohea Cleghorn, I am a 28-year-old Kanaka Maoli, a Native Hawaiian. I come from a long line of powerful women, women who know their genealogical relationship to this Earth, who know their ancestral connection to the Cosmos, and who know their roles as caretakers of that which provides everything for their survival, Earth. It is with this wisdom passed down to me by my ancestors that I know my place in this world as a native woman, and that place, that kuleana or “responsibility” if you will, is one of advocacy. Today, I must speak for those who do not speak our language. Today, I must stand for those who have no feet, and I must break the silence for the injustices that are damaging our planet, which we consider to be our Mother and our Creator, the Giver of Life.

According to my culture, my traditions and my practices, Mauna Kea is a living, breathing, speaking, and feeling being. Mauna Kea has a heart that beats, it is not a physical heart, but a spiritual heart, that radiates and connects to the hearts of those humans who are open to and conscious of it. When connected with the heart of our mountain, we learn how to soften our hearts, we learn compassion that has no conditions, her heart teaches us how to expand our capacity for love.

These lessons taught to me have been passed down through my family, my great great grandmother, Hana Kailimahuna, was a pure Hawaiian woman from Kohala, Hawaii. It is through her lineage that I am related to Wakea and Papahanaumoku. These ancestors, Wakea and Papahanaumoku, are who tie me genealogically to Mauna Kea and they are present today in my DNA, this is where their knowledge and their wisdom are accessible for learning. I have had many teachers who have shaped my relationship to and knowledge of Mauna Kea, including my kumu hula, Nalani Kanakaole of Halau O Kekuhi, but it is my ancestors, beginning with Wakea and Papahanaumoku, that guide and teach me of the sacredness, of the divinity of the temple that is Mauna Kea.

Since I moved to Hawaii Island in 2007 from Oahu, I have been making the pilgrimage up to Mauna Kea. I consider ascending Mauna Kea a pilgrimage because it is a journey to do ceremony to learn from the Mountain, to strengthen my relationship to the Earth and to the Cosmos and to gain insight to my life and my purpose in it. We, myself and my ‘Ohana, have specific traditional Hawaiian protocols we do every time we ascend Mauna Kea. We do not take traveling to Mauna Kea lightly, for it is a revered journey, so we go in our most sacred state of mind, heart and spirit. We go on this pilgrimage 4 times each year, often more.

On June 24, 2015, I was seven months pregnant with my baby girl, Pilali La‘ikūmauna. That morning, I drove my truck up to Hale Pōhaku to take my family and friends to conduct ceremony and to mālama, care for the sacred temple, Mauna Kea. As a woman rooted in traditional Hawaiian ceremony, I stayed to do a morning prayer with the group.

When our morning ceremony concluded, I helped transport people who needed rides up onto the access road. Once my truck was unloaded of people and my prayers for the day were laid down, I started to make my way down the hill to go home and continue my prayers for Mauna Kea from home. However, on my way down the access road, my truck was stopped by a blockade of DLNR and University of Hawaii vehicles, 6-10 cars deep, in the road, they were blocking both lanes of the road so no cars could go up or go down, I was stuck.

Being seven months pregnant, I knew I was at a high altitude and needed to take really good and careful care of myself and my baby. I decided to position myself next to midwives and elder women who I knew would take care of me if anything were to happen. We were gathered in a group of women about a third of the way up the access road, and at that time we could hear the DLNR officers and the protectors of the mountain arguing, we could feel the unrest that was occurring at the bottom of the access road. So we decided that our efforts would be most beneficial for all parties and all people involved if we rooted ourselves in prayer, and pray we did. We linked arms with one another to strengthen our connection, and we began to pray. We grounded ourselves together on our sacred Mountain which we believe to be a living temple and we prayed for the healing of not just our people, but of all people everywhere. We prayed for the hearts of the DLNR officers, we prayed for the hearts and minds of the TMT Construction workers, we prayed for all parties involved with Mauna Kea to soften their hearts and to listen to her truth, to listen and learn from her lessons, these lessons of unity and of oneness, awareness that there is no separation between us. We went into a deep ceremony standing arm in arm, feet on the ground, hearts open, chanting our truths, singing our prayers to the world, all the chaos of people rushing past us did not even phase us, for we were in deep connection, we were in ceremony with our Mountain.

Suddenly, there were these rough hands in black gloves coming at me from all angles, grabbing at my shoulders, and a rough man's voice shouting at me "YOU ARE ARRESTED!" I was jolted out of this sacred space of ceremony and entered into a state of total shock, for I had completely forgotten where I was... one minute, I was in pule, in sacred ceremony, and the next, I was being aggressively grabbed at with violent words! I froze, and began to shake, never had I been disrupted from a sacred communion with Akua in ceremony and prayer. I feared first, that the officers aggressive, and seemingly reckless behavior would physically hurt me and my unborn child. Then I feared that my child would be hurt by the shock of being ripped out of ceremony by this DLNR officers disrespect, imprinting upon her so much that it would affect her ability to feel safe on Mauna Kea in the future, for it is in the womb that we develop feelings, start to taste and begin conscious learning. At this point, with all these fears flooding my mind, I was in a state of severe emotional distress, and all I could muster at that point was, "I will walk off

the road, you don't have to arrest me, I will get out of the way."

Being seven months pregnant, it was not at all my intention to be in a place of conflict, and just wanted to keep the peace, so I began to walk off the road. Then the officer shouted, while still grabbing at me, "No! You are under arrest!" Before I could respond, three elders and four of my friends shouted, "SHE IS PREGNANT! YOU CANNOT ARREST HER!" pulling me off the road. My friends and elders surrounded me, creating a barrier and defending me and my baby from the DLNR officers, they could not penetrate through this barricade of me and my child's protectors. At this point, my body had gone into total shock and I was shaking uncontrollably from the trauma! Two of the elder women held me and hugged me while two others went into pule to release the trauma that was just inflicted upon me and my unborn child.

As a mother, pregnant with her child, standing on her temple, in her place of worship, the constant threat of TMT construction workers barging their way up the Mountain, clogging traffic and boring into the top of our temple, is a feeling beyond physical pain. Today, as I write this testimony, I am a mother, I have given birth naturally without drugs, to my baby girl, so trust me when I say that now, I know physical pain. But the distress I feel for the desecration on the top of Mauna Kea at the last plateau that faces North to the rest of the archipelago, at the proposed TMT site, that harm, is severe, it is beyond physical and honestly has surpassed the feeling of pain. The construction of the TMT causes me spiritual trauma. Now, when I go to the summit of Mauna Kea to conduct my ritual, my traditional Hawaiian ceremony, I am deeply distracted by the wounds of the gaping holes, the scratching and tearing of the terrain to make roads for trucks to drive. The trauma my eyes witness when at the summit of Mauna Kea is just the beginning of the hurt my body, mind and heart suffer from this invalid permit and construction at the proposed site of the TMT.

If I am going to be honest, I must say that the trauma of this experience of being literally, physically, ripped out of ceremony that day has not yet healed for my daughter or for myself. I am a woman of healing and I know how to heal many things, but this sort of spiritual trauma, I do not know how to heal. Honestly I don't even know how to feel it, the moment it happened, I just buried it so deep within me because I did not know how to process this type of trauma, that of the spirit. I truly wish I could give you more details about this trauma, your honor, but I'm sad to say that I have not yet uncovered just how traumatized I am from this experience. It is something I and my family have to live with, and we are learning what helps and what doesn't help. I am thankful for my community healers for all their help. But ultimately, I pose the question to myself, how can I feel safe when my temple, my place of worship, where I go to find refuge, is under constant threat. Mauna Kea's physical and spiritual existence is under threat of TMT, and that threat causes me continual fear for my spiritual safety.

In closing, I would first like to say that it is my spiritual belief that continually brings me to the Mountain to take a stand against its desecration and destruction. This destruction of Mauna Kea goes against everything I was ever taught, everything I know and all that I believe. This experience that happened on June 24th, 2015 is sadly, just an example of the kind of ongoing discrimination against my belief system. How many more pleas do you have to hear, your honor, to soften your own heart, to bring justice to our most sacred environment. Please, do not take long. I do not know how much longer I will be able to take this blatant discrimination, this trauma, this spiritual abuse. Disparaging my community by forcing our genealogical and spiritual connections to assimilate to the destruction of TMT again is only the surface of the issue. For this trauma of the spirit, of the psyche continues, every time you invalidate my beliefs about Mauna Kea.

From my heart to yours,
Jessie Kaleinohea Cleghorn